



Part One
DUR PIG





DUR PIG

Dur Pig was a small toy pig made of the same material as a soft towel. He had little plastic beans in his tummy, which made him fun to throw. His squishy trotters were exactly the right size to wipe away a tear. When his owner, Jack, was very young, he fell asleep every night sucking Dur Pig's ear.

Dur Pig got his name because when Jack started to talk, he said "dur pig" instead of "the pig." When new, Dur Pig had been salmony-pink, with shiny black plastic eyes, but Jack couldn't remember Dur Pig looking like that. Dur Pig had surely always been as he was now: grayish and faded, with one ear stiff from all the sucking. Dur Pig's eyes fell out, leaving tiny holes in his face for a while, but then Jack's mum, who was a nurse, sewed little buttons in place of the missing plastic beads. When

Jack came home from nursery that afternoon, Dur Pig was lying on the kitchen table wrapped up in a woolen scarf, waiting for Jack to take off the little bandage covering his eyes. Mum had even made Dur Pig a set of medical notes: "DP Jones. Operation to attach buttons. Surgeon: Mum."

After his eye operation, everyone started calling Dur Pig "DP" for short. From the time he was two years old, Jack would never go to bed without DP, which often caused problems, because when bedtime came, DP was usually nowhere to be found. Sometimes it took Mum and Dad a long time to find DP, who turned up in all kinds of places: hiding inside one of Dad's shoes or scrunched up in a flowerpot.

"Why d'you keep hiding him, Jack?" Mum asked every time she found DP curled up in a kitchen drawer or hidden beneath a sofa cushion.

The answer was private, between Jack and DP. Jack knew DP liked cozy spaces where he could snuggle up and sleep.

DP liked doing exactly the same things Jack did: crawling under bushes and into hidey-holes and being thrown up in the air, Jack by his Dad, and DP by Jack. DP didn't mind getting dirty, or being dropped accidentally in a puddle, as long as he and Jack were having fun together.

Once, when Jack was three, he put DP in the recycling bin. When he'd heard Mum say the bin was for recycling, Jack thought it had something to do with bike rides, so he waited for Mum to leave the kitchen, then dropped DP in there, imagining he'd have a little spin around when the lid was on. Mum laughed when Jack explained why he was peeking in the bin to try and catch the things moving. She explained that "recycling" meant something very different to going for a bike ride. All the things in the bin were going to be taken away and turned into other things, so they'd have a whole new life. Jack definitely didn't want DP to go away and be changed into something else, so he never put DP in the recycling bin again.

All his adventures gave DP his interesting smell, which Jack liked very much. It was a mixture of the places DP had gone on his adventures, along with the warm dark cave under Jack's blankets, and just a trace of Mum's perfume, because she always hugged and kissed DP, too, when she came to say good night to Jack.

Every now and then, Mum would decide DP had gotten a bit too smelly and needed a good clean. The first time DP ever went in the washing machine, Jack had lain on the kitchen floor and screamed with rage and fear. Mum had tried to show Jack how much DP was enjoying swirling around in the washing machine, but it wasn't until DP was back in the cave under Jack's blankets that night, soft and dry and smelling of washing powder, that Jack really forgave Mum. He soon got used to DP going in the washing machine, but he always looked forward to DP returning to his natural smell.

The very worst that ever happened to DP was when Jack was four, and lost him at the beach. Dad had already packed up the towels and Mum was helping Jack back into his sweatshirt, when Jack suddenly remembered burying DP somewhere, though he couldn't quite remember where. They searched until the sun was setting and the beach was almost empty, and Dad got really cross, and Jack wailed and sobbed, but Mum kept telling him not to give up hope, and digging all round with her hands. Then, just as Dad was saying they'd have to leave without DP, Jack dug his bare foot into the sand and his toes hit something squashy. Jack pulled DP out, sobbing with happiness, and Dad said that DP was never to come to the beach again, which Jack thought very unfair, because DP loved sand, which was why Jack had buried him in the first place.



MUM AND DAD

Shortly before Jack started school, a letter arrived telling all the parents that the children should bring their favorite cuddly toy with them on their first day. Everybody in Jack's class brought a teddy, but Jack, of course, brought DP. Each child took his or her turn to walk up to the front of the class and explain what their cuddly toy's name was, and why they liked it. When it was Jack's turn, he explained why DP was called "DP," and about the operation on his eyes, and about the day he got buried on the beach and was nearly lost forever. The stories of DP and his adventures made the class laugh and when Jack finished talking, they all clapped. DP was easily the funniest and most interesting toy, even though he was one of the shabbiest. At playtime, Jack and a boy called Freddie played catch with DP. Just before the end of break,

Jack dropped DP in a puddle. That night, DP had to go in the washing machine again.

If Jack ever had a bad day at school—if he got a low mark, or had an argument with Freddie, or if somebody made fun of Jack's wonky clay pot—DP was waiting at home to wipe away a tear with his small, squishy trotters. Whatever happened to Jack, DP was there, understanding and forgiving, and carrying with him that comforting smell of home, which always came back, no matter how often Mum washed it off.

One night, soon after he'd started school, a noise woke Jack up. He felt for DP and drew him close in the dark.

Somebody was shouting. The voice was a bit like Dad's. Then there was a crash and a lady screamed: it sounded like Mum, but not as Jack had ever heard her. Jack was scared. He listened for a few more moments, pressing DP against his mouth and nose, and he knew DP was scared, too.

Jack thought Mum and Dad might be fighting a burglar together. He knew the number you had to call for the police, so he got out of bed in the dark and crept out onto the landing. Still holding DP, he tiptoed downstairs. Dad was still yelling and Mum was still screaming. Jack couldn't hear the burglar's voice.

Then the sitting room door banged open and Dad strode into the hall. He wasn't wearing his pajamas, but jeans and a sweatshirt. Dad didn't notice Jack on the stairs. He opened the front door, walked out, and slammed it behind him. Jack heard the noise of the car engine in the drive. Dad drove away.

Jack crept into the sitting room. The lamp was on the floor and Mum was sitting on the sofa with her face in her hands, crying. When she heard Jack's footsteps, she looked up, startled, then cried harder than ever. Jack thought she'd explain **everything** and make it all better, but

when he ran to her, she only hugged him very close, the way he held DP
when he was hurt or sad.



CHANGES

Dad didn't live with them anymore after that.

Mum and Dad explained to Jack separately that they didn't want to be married anymore. Jack told them he understood. He said that other people at school had mums and dads who didn't live together. He could tell that they needed him to be all right about it all, so he pretended he was.

But some nights, after Mum had kissed him and closed the door, Jack cried into DP's limp body. DP knew and understood everything without being told. He knew about the hard lump in Jack's chest. His trotters wiped away Jack's tears. Jack didn't have to pretend in the dark with DP.

Soon after Jack's sixth birthday, Dad took Jack out for a burger, gave him a big box of LEGOs, and explained that he'd gotten a job abroad.

"I can talk to you all the time, though, Jack," said Dad. "You can fly on an airplane to visit me. It'll be fun, won't it?"

Jack didn't think it sounded nearly as much fun as having a dad around to play with, but he didn't say that. Jack was getting used to not saying things.

Next, Mum told him it might be a good idea if they moved to be closer to Gran and Grandpa, who could take care of Jack when she needed to work late. She had a new job at a big hospital, and Grandpa had found them a lovely house with a garden, just two streets away from Gran and Grandpa's house. Gran and Grandpa owned a very naughty dog called Toby. Jack found Toby-the-dog funny.

"But will I have to leave school?" asked Jack, thinking of his best friend, Freddie.

"Yes," said Mum, "but there's a school very near our new house. I know you'll love it."

"I don't think I will," said Jack.

He didn't want to move and he didn't want a new school. Mum didn't seem to understand: Jack didn't want any more changes. He wanted to stay with his school friends and in the old house, where he and DP had had so many adventures.

Gran and Grandpa talked to Jack on the phone. They told him how much they were looking forward to him and Mum coming to live near them, and what fun they'd have playing with Toby-the-dog in the park. So Jack said it was all right, but he didn't really mean it. The only person who seemed to understand was DP. Jack knew DP would miss all their favorite hiding places, too.

A few weeks after Mum had told Jack about the new house, Jack said goodbye to his teacher and Freddie. The next day, the removal men came and took away everything that made the old house look like home, and Mum drove Jack and DP a hundred miles in their car.

Jack had to admit the journey was fun. DP sat on Jack's lap, and Mum and Jack played I Spy and stopped for pizza and ice cream halfway. Mum let Jack buy two gobstoppers out of the gumball machine, one for him and one for DP (although, as Jack explained to Mum back in the car, he'd have to eat DP's for him).

He hadn't expected to, but Jack liked the new house. His bedroom was next to Mum's and there was a tall tree outside his window. Gran and Grandpa arrived five minutes after they did, with bags of food to fill up the fridge. The first thing Toby-the-dog did was to try and snatch DP out of Jack's hand.

"No, Toby, you know DP's mine!" said Jack. He shoved DP down the front of his sweatshirt to keep him safe, but with his head sticking out so DP could see what was going on.

The removal men lifted all their familiar furniture into the house. Mum and Gran put away all the kitchen things while Jack, Grandpa, Toby-the-dog, and DP explored the garden. It had lots of interesting hiding places and excellent high perches for DP, but Jack kept him close, because he didn't trust Toby-the-dog not to try and snatch him again.

That night, Jack held DP in bed, breathing in his familiar comforting smell, and they silently agreed that moving day hadn't been nearly as bad as Jack had expected. There were no curtains on Jack's window yet, and DP and Jack watched the leaves fluttering against the darkening sky outside, before they fell asleep.



HOLLY MACAULAY

When Monday arrived, Mum caught Jack trying to sneak DP into his schoolbag.

"No, Jack," she said gently. "What if he got lost?"

The thought of DP getting lost at a new school among strangers was dreadful, so Jack put DP back in his bedroom, but he felt very lonely and frightened as he approached the school gates.

"I'm sure you'll have a lovely day," said Mum, hugging him before the bell rang and he had to go inside.

Jack didn't say anything. He was frowning with the effort it took not to look scared.

The children in his new class all stared at him. They seemed bigger than the people in his old class. The teacher spoke to him kindly and asked his name. Then she asked the rest of the class to come to the front one by one, to show what they'd collected for the nature topic. Jack didn't have anything, of course, so he watched while people showed leaves, acorns, and conkers to the class.

Then came break time. Jack found a corner where nobody would bother him.

After break, the teacher told everybody to take out their reading books. She gave one to Jack. Then she told the children that today was a special day, because some older students were visiting the class. Everybody would get a partner who'd help them with their reading.

The classroom door opened and in came lots of big children from the top year. They were all grinning and a few of them waved at younger children whom they knew. Jack felt more scared than ever.

One tall girl stood out from the rest. She had long black hair, which she'd tied back in a ponytail. She wasn't giggling behind her hand like a lot of the other big girls. She stood calmly while the teacher invited the older children to pick a partner. When the tall girl caught Jack's eye, he quickly examined his fingers.

The big children began moving among the desks and Jack's classmates all began whispering, "Holly! Holly! Over here, Holly!"

The girl sitting beside Jack was whispering, "Holly! Holly!" too.

When she saw Jack looking at her, the girl next to him explained, "See her, with the long black hair? That's Holly Macaulay. She's a really good gymnast. She's been on TV."

"Hello," said a voice a long way above Jack's head.

He looked up. Holly Macaulay, who'd been on TV, was looking down at him.

"You're new, aren't you?" she said.

Jack tried to say yes but his voice wouldn't work. Everyone was staring at him, and the frantic whispers of "Holly, Holly, Holly, over here!" became louder than ever.

But Holly Macaulay ignored all of them. She pulled up a chair and sat down beside Jack.

"I'm going to be *your* partner," she said.

It might seem strange to compare a floppy little pig to a tall eleven-year-old girl who'd been on TV, but not to Jack. DP had brought him friends on his very first day at his old school, and Holly Macaulay did the same for him at his new school. After just one hour with Holly as his reading partner, Jack was no longer the quiet new boy. He was the boy Holly Macaulay had chosen, the boy Holly Macaulay called "my mate Jack" when she saw him at the packed lunch table later.

The rest of his class was impressed. They wanted to talk to him now. After he'd finished his sandwiches at lunchtime, a boy called Rory asked Jack if he wanted to play football. Rory knew lots of good jokes. When Mum picked Jack up at the end of the day, Rory tugged his mum over to Jack's mum, and the two mothers made arrangements for Jack to go and play at Rory's house later in the week.

DP was delighted Jack had had such a good first day at his new school. He loved hearing about Holly Macaulay and Rory. Of course, Jack didn't have to say anything out loud. Snuggled under the blankets, with the sound of rustling leaves just outside his window, DP knew and understood everything without being told. Jack fell asleep with DP's bean-filled body against his cheek, his familiar smell mingling with that of the new paint in Jack's room.



HOLLY'S DP

All that term, Jack and Holly remained reading partners. The more he got to know her, the more he understood why his whole class wanted to be her friend.

Apart from being very clever, and always getting top marks, and having a voice good enough to sing solos at assembly, Holly Macaulay was one of the best young gymnasts in the country. She'd been on TV once and in the newspaper twice. It was her ambition to compete in the Olympic Games. Some of this she told Jack herself, the rest he heard from other people.

Holly wasn't bigheaded, even though she was famous. She showed Jack the bruises she got when she fell off the beam. Gymnastics sound-

ed like very hard work. Holly told Jack how she had to win and keep winning. Even getting second place wasn't good enough. She couldn't afford to lose, if she was to get to the Olympics.

Then one day, Holly appeared for their reading lesson looking strange. Her eyes were red and puffy and when she said hello, her voice came out as a croak.

Even though he liked Holly very much, Jack was still a little bit shy with her.

"Did you . . . did you lose?" he whispered. He remembered that Holly had had a big gymnastics competition at the weekend.

She shook her head. "I didn't go."

"Were you ill?" asked Jack.

Again, Holly shook her head.

They read another page of Jack's reading book. Then a big tear splashed onto the page.

"My mum's left my dad," whispered Holly.

Sheltering behind Jack's reading book, she told him everything.

Holly's mum had told her to pack a bag and then driven her away to a flat while Holly's dad was still at work at the hospital. Holly didn't know when she'd next see her dad. She missed him. He was the one who usually took her to gymnastics competitions. Her mum had explained that she didn't love Holly's dad anymore.

"They both want me to live with them," Holly told Jack in a whisper. "I don't know what to do."

After reading hour was over and Holly returned to her own class, Jack wondered what had made her tell him all those secret, private things. Perhaps, he thought, he was like Holly's DP. Even though he hadn't said much, he'd understood.



MORE CHANGES

Jack had gotten used to Dad sending him postcards from all the different cities he visited for work. Mum stuck the postcards on the fridge where Jack could always see them. There was one with bridges over canals, and another of a town set high in the snowy mountains. Jack spoke to Dad by phone and texted him pictures of the drawings he'd done at school and his Level Four swimming certificate. Jack loved swimming. He was one of the best in his class, so he had his seventh birthday party at the pool. Lots of his classmates came, including his best friend, Rory.

Before school broke up for the summer, Holly Macaulay was on television for the second time. She came to the front at assembly to show

everyone another gold medal, and the whole school applauded, and she waved and winked at Jack.

Mum and Jack went away to Greece on holiday, with Gran and Grandpa. DP came, too. He loved the sun. His limp little body was bleached a paler shade of gray as he lay on a towel beside Jack by the pool, but Jack remembered not to bury him in the sand again.

When Jack returned to school for the new year, Holly Macaulay had moved up to Big School. He missed seeing her, but he had lots of friends now.

One evening, Gran and Grandpa came over to babysit, because Mum was going out. This was strange, because Mum never usually went out in the evenings. When he asked where she was going, Mum told Jack she was going out for dinner with a friend. She looked pretty. She was wearing a new dress.

After that, Mum went out once a week in the evening. Jack didn't mind. He had fun with Gran and Grandpa, who played board games with him, but he always made sure to put DP up somewhere high when Toby-the-dog was staying the night.

Then, one sunny weekend, Mum told Jack that her friend Brendan was coming over in his car and that the three of them would be going out for the day.

"Is it Brendan you go to dinner with?" Jack asked. Mum said it was.

Brendan turned out to be a friendly looking man with a deep voice. He drove Mum and Jack to a country park where there was an adventure playground. Jack went down the slide and climbed up the rope net, but he wasn't really having much fun. It felt strange not having Mum to himself. After Jack had had enough of the adventure playground, the three of them went for a walk down to the river. Brendan showed Jack

how to skim stones over the water. Jack would much rather it had been Dad teaching him.

After Brendan had driven them home and said goodbye, Mum asked whether Jack liked Brendan. Jack said he was quite nice.

They went out a lot with Brendan after that. Jack could tell that Mum really liked Brendan. Once he came back from the swings and saw them holding hands on a bench, but Mum quickly let go when she realized Jack had seen.

Beneath the blankets, DP understood everything without being told. He knew Jack felt strange about Brendan holding Mum's hand, even though Jack liked Brendan a bit more, now that he'd gotten to know him. DP understood that Jack would rather it had been his dad holding Mum's hand. DP shared Jack's worry that if Brendan stopped wanting to be Mum's friend anymore, she'd get sad again. DP was the only one Jack could tell how much he wanted things to stop changing. He never needed to pretend with DP.



NOT JACK'S DAD

Jack knew that Brendan—like Mum—had been married before, and that he had a daughter. Some weekends Brendan didn't see Mum because his daughter came to stay with him and he was busy doing things with her.

One day, Mum announced that the four of them were going to go to the cinema together: Mum, Jack, Brendan, and his daughter, Holly.

"Holly?" said Jack.

And sure enough, there she was: Holly Macaulay, taller than ever now and much older looking than Jack remembered. There was another change, too. Though he was so pleased to see Holly, she didn't seem very pleased to see Jack. She was *polite to Mum but* when Mum asked her

about her gymnastics, Holly only said yes and no. She wouldn't let Mum help her with anything, and when Mum asked her if she wanted to go to the bathroom, she said she was old enough to go by herself, thanks very much. Jack didn't like Holly being rude to his mum. It was the first time he'd ever seen Holly be nasty to anyone.

Talking it over later with DP in bed (they weren't really talking, of course, but it came to the same thing, because DP understood everything Jack thought), Jack supposed that Holly found it odd to see her dad with another lady. All the same, his mum was lovely. Holly shouldn't talk to her like that.

Nearly a year after Brendan had taught Jack to skim stones over the water, Mum said that she had something to tell Jack. She looked nervous. She was hiding her left hand in her lap.

"Brendan has asked me to marry him," she said.

"Oh," said Jack.

He thought for a bit.

"Will he come and live with us?"

"Yes," said Mum, still looking nervous. "Do you mind, Jack?"

Jack liked Brendan a lot better now. Brendan had taught him to play checkers, and helped him with his homework. All the same, he didn't see why they couldn't keep things as they were.

"Will I have to call him 'Dad'?"

"No," said Mum. "Your dad is 'Dad.' You can keep calling Brendan, 'Brendan.'"

"Do Gran and Grandpa know?" asked Jack. He secretly hoped Gran and Grandpa might not be happy about it, but Mum said they liked Brendan very much, and were glad.

"Will Holly be my sister?"

"Your stepsister," said Mum. "You like Holly, don't you?"

"Yes," said Jack.

It was sort of true. He'd never forgotten how kind Holly had been to him when he'd first come to school. Sometimes she was a lot of fun, but at other times she could be sharp and sarcastic. Mum said it was because she was a teenager.

Mum and Brendan got married in a registry office in late summer. Jack had to wear a suit, because he was the ring bearer. Holly was bridesmaid and wore a blue dress, with cornflowers in her long hair.

Afterward, they all went to a restaurant. Brendan's mum and dad came. They were very kind to Jack and got on well with Gran and Grandpa. Everybody seemed happy, although Holly didn't talk much.

"She's got a big competition next week," said Brendan, putting his arm around Holly in her bridesmaid's dress. "We're all going to go and cheer her on."

"Who's 'we'?" asked Holly.

"Judy and Jack could come, too," said Brendan. Judy was Jack's mum's name.

"I don't want them to come," said Holly. Her eyes had filled with tears. "I want you to come on your own, like always."

There was a little silence at the table and then everybody talked loudly at once.

Much later in the evening, one of Brendan's friends played the piano and the grown-ups danced. Jack felt sleepy. He wanted his bed and DP.

Then Holly sat down beside him at the table. She spoke in a low, fierce voice.

"He's not your dad," she said. "He's mine. Just because he lives with you doesn't make him your dad. Understand?"

Holly's expression scared Jack a bit.

"Yes," he said. "I understand."



THE TOILET ROLL ANGEL

From then on, Holly spent alternate weekends at their house. Jack never knew whether she was going to be kind Holly or mean Holly. He and Mum were never allowed to watch Holly do her gymnastics. They were barely allowed to ask her how competitions went.

When Holly was in a good mood, she'd play video games with Jack and football in the back garden. At other times—especially if she'd lost a competition—she could be really horrible. Once, she called him a stupid baby when she saw him cuddling DP. Jack felt ashamed, and after that, he hid DP whenever Holly was coming to stay.